

Say 'diploma' en español

The Register - Guard - Eugene, Or.

Author: Nat Levy The Register-Guard

Date: Jan 22, 2009

Start Page: B.11

Text Word Count: 634

Document Text

Carmina Lozano hasn't set foot in a classroom in almost 15 years.

Lozano left her home state of Guerrero in the south of Mexico with her daughter and a goal. "Tener un buen futuro para mi nia y familia - to have a good future for my child and my family," she said.

Now, Lozano has settled in Eugene and is one of a select few students admitted to Downtown Languages' new Plaza Comunitaria - or community plaza - program. Certified by the Mexican government, the program gives local residents a way to pursue and complete Mexico's elementary, middle or high school diplomas. The program is taught entirely in Spanish.

Downtown Languages is the first to offer the Plaza Comunitaria in Lane County. Other Oregon-based Plaza Comunitarias are in Salem, Woodburn, Bend and Portland.

Lozano works morning shifts at Pacific Headwear, where a co-worker, Martha Moran, told her about the program.

"I'm always telling everyone," said Moran, who also works as a receptionist at Downtown Languages. "I want them to study."

The Mexican consulate runs the Plaza Comunitaria program with a goal of educating all Mexican citizens, including those who don't reside within Mexico's borders. People from other Latin American countries also may participate.

Other countries throughout the region have agreements with Mexico to recognize degrees from the program, and most U.S. universities recognize a Plaza Comunitaria degree, said Downtown Languages director Tom Evans.

Students complete the program online, so they can do their coursework on their own schedule, said Mark Corley, Plaza Comunitaria administrator at Downtown Languages. Students only come into the classrooms at Downtown Languages when they have a test. That's helpful to people like Lozano, whose job and family can make it difficult to get away to classes.

The program is free to students, in accordance with Mexico's Constitution, which mandates that all education be provided to citizens for free. Downtown Languages pays for the program out of its own operating costs. Evans said Downtown Languages added the program because it fits the institution's philosophy of providing training in several languages at an affordable cost.

Most students entering the program have been out of school for a long time after immigrating to the United States, Corley said. The lapse in hitting the books can make some people fearful, but students often find they are actually better prepared to learn, Corley said.

"They've gotten lots of education through their everyday lives," he said.

Evans said Downtown Languages, founded in 2004 after several language programs at Lane Community College's downtown campus closed, helps people from a variety of backgrounds adapt to life in the United States. Along with the Plaza Comunitaria, Downtown Languages offers instruction in both English and Spanish, and in such subjects as U.S. citizenship and computer literacy.

On a recent morning, Leah Claypool's English 1 class studied bodily injuries and medical terms. The class, with 12 enrollees, helps encourage students to interact with people from different backgrounds.

The students, whose native languages range from Spanish to Korean to Russian, learned how to describe physical ailments to a doctor. Students generally picked up the lingo quickly, but there were also the invariable mix-ups that surface when learning English. Claypool quickly clarified, and assured the students not to worry.

"It's English, so it's a little crazy," she said.

Lozano has branched out from her comfort zone of taking classes in Spanish by adding an English class. She hopes to bring the equivalent of a high school degree back to Mexico, so she can later study psychology.

Although Plaza Comunitaria is only in its test run at Downtown Languages, Evans said he's enthusiastic about attracting a growing number of students.

"These are not people who are coming to get something for free," he said. "They actually want to be part of this community."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.

Abstract (Document Summary)

Now, [Lozano] has settled in Eugene and is one of a select few students admitted to Downtown Languages' new Plaza Comunitaria - or community plaza - program. Certified by the Mexican government, the program gives local residents a way to pursue and complete Mexico's elementary, middle or high school diplomas. The program is taught entirely in Spanish.

"I'm always telling everyone," said [Martha Moran], who also works as a receptionist at Downtown Languages. "I want them to study."

[Tom Evans] said Downtown Languages, founded in 2004 after several language programs at Lane Community College's downtown campus closed, helps people from a variety of backgrounds adapt to life in the United States. Along with the Plaza Comunitaria, Downtown Languages offers instruction in both English and Spanish, and in such subjects as U.S. citizenship and computer literacy.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.